



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

29 September 2023

Agenda Item 6 – Buses: EEH’s Statement of Intent

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

a) Comments and agrees the Draft ‘Statement of Intent’, arising from the EEH Bus Symposium 2023.

1. Purpose of report

1.1. This paper provides Board members with the draft ‘Statement of Intent’ which provides direction for EEH’s future work on buses.

2. Key points to note

- 2.1. Improving bus journeys and increasing patronage is a key strategic ambition of the region, vital for connecting more people to jobs and services, growing the economy and lowering emissions.
- 2.2. EEH held its Bus Symposium on 15 September in Luton. The event was well attended and included nine Board members.
- 2.3. Priorities for EEH work identified during the symposium have been summarised into a draft ‘statement of intent’.
- 2.4. Subject to Board comments, EEH will now begin progressing these actions.

3. Context

- 3.1. Despite recent government funding interventions, the future of bus-based transit remains uncertain, with passenger numbers across the region down by as much as 33% on pre-pandemic levels, with many services, most notably in rural areas being lost fallings.
- 3.2. In March 2023 the Strategic Transport Leadership Board discussed challenges associated with bus provision and agreed to an event which focused on finding solutions to these issues.
- 3.3. The EEH Bus Symposium took place on the 15 September, held at Luton’s Stockwood Park Discovery Centre. All local authorities were represented amongst the 40 delegates, including nine Board members and/ or portfolio holders.
- 3.4. The symposium included a range of expert speakers, including from the Department for Transport, bus companies, County Councils Network and local authorities. Slides from the event are available on our [website](#), alongside a brochure setting the context for bus in the region.
- 3.5. The event covered both ‘service’ and ‘system’ changes which could improve bus patronage. Priorities identified during the symposium have now been turned into a draft ‘statement of intent’ for future work for the Board’s consideration.

- 3.6. The symposium has received excellent feedback, highlighting the value of getting members, officers and experts into one room to find solutions for a specific challenge. It offers a template for future events which EEH could organise, taking on board feedback to further improve the day.

4. 'Statement of intent'

- 4.1. At the end of the summit key areas which can be taken forward as priorities were broadly agreed by delegates.
- 4.2. The draft statement of intent below covers three broad areas that EEH, in partnership with local authorities, DfT and bus operators, will look to progress.

Area A: Total transport

- 4.3. The symposium recognised the gaps in provision by 'traditional' bus networks and vehicles.
- 4.4. Integrating home-to-school transport was a particular focus, alongside the potential for patient transport, taxis and delivery vehicles to fill gaps in provision.
- 4.5. EEH will explore how current barriers to 'total transport' can be overcome, recognising the importance of solutions working across local authority boundaries.

Area B: Models and funding

- 4.6. The symposium discussed the ways in which local authorities can currently influence the provision of bus journeys, including through enhanced partnerships, alongside other measures such as franchising and municipal bus companies which are currently limited by legislation.
- 4.7. There was a clear appetite for EEH to advocate the need for enhanced partnerships which give local authorities greater powers to influence bus services.
- 4.8. As part of this, it is recommended that EEH adopts a formal policy position of asking government to give all local transport authorities (and groupings of local transport authorities) the option to establish a franchising model and to set up municipal bus companies. This reflects the position of the Local Government Association and County Council Network.
- 4.9. EEH will explore routes and options for franchising and municipal bus companies in more detail, so that our partners can be better prepared and informed if legislation is changed.
- 4.10. Funding was also raised as a significant issue, including the disparities in bus service improvement plan (BSIP) funding. Local authorities will soon be expected to refresh their BSIPs. To strengthen the ambition of individual BSIPs, it is proposed that EEH produces a section which can be inserted into the documents providing a baseline and ambition for buses in the region, including greater scope for cross-boundary journeys.
- 4.11. We will also make the case to government that there are too many different forms of strategic policy and bidding for bus funding, for example Local Transport Plans (LTP) Bus Service Operator Grants (BSOG) and BSIP. These should be consolidated (potentially as part of a move to five-year financial settlements). Moreover, we will highlight the need for flexibility in bus funding, including the limitations on capital funding to improve, for example, bus stops, when the actual services which would call at these stops are extremely limited.

Area C: Journey planning

- 4.12. The symposium identified the need for journey planning for buses (and other modes) to be better integrated – making journeys as seamless and attractive as possible for the passenger.
- 4.13. EEH will bring together examples of best practice in 'one ticket solutions', both within local authorities and cross border (based on demand).
- 4.14. We will explore technological support for better public transport journey planning for trips across the region, for example Traveline and Citymapper.



- 4.15. EEH will continue its work on mobility hubs which bring modes together in one convenient location, alongside other amenities. We aim to secure funding which facilitate test pilots of mobility hubs in predominantly rural locations.
- 4.16. In conjunction with the above, we will explore the merits of a marketing and promotions campaign in the region aimed at encouraging more people to use public transport, highlighting the ways in which they can plan and integrate their journeys.
- 4.17. Moreover, our work with partners on ensuring world class local connectivity to East West Rail stations will serve as a catalyst for improving bus services to transport hubs across the region.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. Following the Board's comment/ approval of the above statement of intent, EEH will work with industry and local authority partners to scope out a costed programme to determine which options EEH could take forward during the current financial, and what elements can be funded in the next financial year.
- 5.2. This will consider where our work is likely to have the greatest impact and benefit based on the funding available. EEH will also be working with DfT to consider fully the suggested 'ask for government'. This will include a letter to the minister responsible for buses, Richard Holden, outlining the work we have done so far and our policy 'asks'.
- 5.3. In addition to the 'Statement of intent', EEH will continue to work with its public transport operators and local authority partners to deliver its existing buses work programme as part of its Regional Bus Forum and Strategy, to further the case for a more integrated regional public transport network.

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